

## **Crimean stable instability and outcomes of the crimean by-elections**

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During the by-elections to the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, observers and experts predicted that its outcomes could potentially improve the general political climate in the Crimean corridors of power. What they meant was an opportunity of Prime Minister of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea Serhiy Kunitsyn to maintain stable majority in the parliament. In summer 2002, that majority consisted of 61 Crimean MPs.

On the other hand, some political forces seemed to have intentions to weaken Serhiy Kunitsyn's positions. Hence, observers linked key tactical steps necessary to reach the desired results to the course of the Crimean by-elections and the beginning of a new political season.

On September 22, 2002, the number of candidates in the Crimean constituencies 25 and 30 was really enormous. For instance, in Hrach's constituency No. 25, 15 candidates (excluding 4 persons who withdrew their candidacies) competed for the mandate, while in the constituency No. 30, the number of political rivals reached 10. In the long run, elections in the traditionally «communist» constituency No. 25 resulted in a victory of deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of three convocations, famous Crimean businessman and President of the Imperia Corporation Lev Myrmysky. He received 4,262 out of 6,943 votes. The number of voters in the constituency's electoral list totaled 12,938. The above gives grounds to believe that influence of the Communist Party of Ukraine on the Crimean elections was strongly overestimated. It confirms the thesis that the 2002 elections indicated gradual weakening of communists' positions in the region. It is indicative that the most promising candidate of the Communist Party Mychailo Bakharev received just 998 votes. The Editor in Chief of the Crimean newspaper Krymskaya Pravda lost some votes because of the so-called Crimean twins show, for it happened that three namesakes ran for seats in different constituencies. Although, taking into account a clear advantage of the winner, it is possible to state that even the absence of those namesakes could not considerably change the outcomes of elections. Mychailo Bakharev's election campaign was built on pro-communist and pro-Russian ideological myths. So, the pro-communist Krymskaya Pravda, which had written that «the constituency No. 25 could not be sold», had to admit its failure and stated, «each constituency has a deputy it deserves» (Mykola Semena, the Zerkalo Nedeli weekly).

Former MP, co-owner of the Zaporizhstal and one of the leaders of the Green Party of

Ukraine Vasyl Khmelnsky won the mandate in the constituency No. 30. He received 4,349 out of the total of 8,745 votes. Support given by the Crimean population to a little-known person was unexpectedly strong. Local observers pointed out that the candidate «never deigned to address voters in his constituency who had to be satisfied with very short and laconic information about the former MP presented in propaganda leaflets» (the Krymskaya Pravda, October 2, 2002). Victory of Vasyl Khmelnsky was identical to that of Nestor Shufrych in the parliamentary by-elections in Cherkasy. Vasyl Khmelnsky successfully beat his famous opponents, President of the Consol Company Volodymyr Konstantinov and deputy of the Crimean Verkhovna Rada of the previous convocation Afanasy Ivanov who had received the largest number of votes in the parliamentary elections but contented himself with just 265 votes in the by-elections.

Finally, the course of events in the Crimea will mostly depend on Lev Myrsky's ability to get registered as deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea simultaneously maintaining his mandate of the deputy of the Ukrainian parliament as long as possible. Actually, he needs to maintain that mandate until he manages to implement his Crimean plans, for he is not going to be just another Crimean MP.

*What Is Next? Who Will Oppose Whom? Who Will Gain or Lose?*

The Crimean political establishment seems to be deeply concerned over the above questions in the context of possible political perturbations.

The very nature of the Crimean parliamentary majority is characterized by destructive factors that can increase latent instability. The fact that 94 out of 95 MPs gave their votes for the decree on division of parliamentary committees and personal composition of the Crimean parliament can serve as a convincing evidence of certain stabilization. For the first time, the Crimean parliament was unanimous in solving a principal issue. However, with regard to mixed composition of the Crimean parliament elected by the majority system, it is hardly possible to believe that the parliamentary majority will be stable for long. In the opinion of leader of the Crimean Mejlis Mustafa Jemilev MP, instability of the parliamentary majority is growing today. «There are deputies in the parliament who opt for the party that pays more. Guided by political considerations of the moment, they stand for Deich. And nobody knows whom they will support tomorrow», he said (the Crimean news agency, September 23, 2002).

At present, the Crimean parliament consists of 49 independent MPs and 47 representatives of different political parties, including 15 members of the Communist Party, 11 - the Agrarian Party, 8 – the People's Democratic Party of Ukraine, 3 – the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (united), 3 – the Party of Regions and 2 – the «Za Yedynu Rus» Party. The Peasant Party of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, the Russian-Ukrainian Union Party, the Trudova Ukraina Party and the Democratic Union are represented in the parliament by 1 member each. Hence, the communist coalition includes 22 MPs, whereas Kunitsyn's Solidarity bloc has 61 members (the Premier mentioned 64 deputies). However, analysis of the composition of

the above coalition indicates that independent MPs make up over 50% of the bloc members. So, political structuring in the Crimea is yet to be achieved. And today, Crimean parliament being unstructured, it is too early to discuss strategic stability of relations between the parliament and the Council of Ministers of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. It is also symptomatic that there were 15 potential candidates for the office of the speaker of the Crimean Verkhovna Rada and 25 – for the office of the Prime Minister. It indicates a stable presence of political forces capable of restructuring the Crimean parliament. The above can happen because of the failure to keep promises in political and economic spheres or intentions of some political forces to more actively participate in privatization and enhance their influence on privatization processes.

According to data of the State Property Fund of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, the register of property units to be privatized incorporates 179 legal entities of republican ownership, 37 state-owned units and 479 units of municipal ownership. The Crimean network of sanatorium and recreational institutions consists of 761 units of different forms of ownership. 14 sanatorium and recreational institutions have to be privatized in the near future.

Observers deem that in the context of deterioration of the situation in the Crimean parliament, a group of businessmen and politicians close to Andriy Senchenko can act as a hypothetical destabilizing factor. Despite the fact that the group had powerful financial, intellectual and mass media resources, it failed to be adequately represented in the Crimean parliament and government.

The above predictions started to be coming true. 100-th day of Kunitsyn's government was marked by rumors that the Crimean government would be dissolved. Incidentally, ex-speaker of the Crimean parliament and leader of Crimean Communists Leonid Hrach was among those who warned that the communist faction was not going to support political forces willing to change the Crimean government in fall 2002. «We shall not act in favor of any part of the split majority», he emphasized (the Zerkalo Nedeli weekly, No. 31, 2002). Observers believed that political changes in the Crimea would be initiated by MPs Andriy Senchenko (the Transparent Power public committee) and Lev Myrmysky.

«I stress once again that no political force is represented in the parliament by more than 15 MPs, including those who hesitate. Kunitsyn's team is believed to be more numerous. However, in my opinion, he does not enjoy that strong support... Structuring of the Crimean parliament is still under way. The Stability bloc is deemed an artificial and unstable structure. So, communists are going to enlist support of some of its members. And Lev Myrmysky, well-known Crimean MP, is also trying to increase the number of his supporters. Everyone has certain motives...» mentioned Andriy Senchenko (the Zerkalo Nedeli weekly, September 14, 2002).

Crimean social democrats could demonstrate certain activity as well. According to the media, Victor Medvedchuk ordered his colleagues to form a bloc in the Crimean parliament (the Zerkalo Nedeli weekly, September 14, 2002). It should be mentioned that the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine (United) (SDPU) substantially improved its

positions on the Crimean peninsula. In 2002, the party was supported by over 120 thousand voters, whereas in 1998, it received only 20,091 votes. Hence, the number of supporters of the SDPU increased by six times and the party ranked the second in the multi-mandate Crimean constituency. Such influential Crimean MPs as Ihor Franchuk, Anatoly Franchuk and Valery Horbatov represent the SDPU. Should the SDPU coalition be formed in the Crimean parliament, it will undoubtedly include MPs from the Stability bloc, which will have rather grave consequences for the «majority» and Kunitsyn himself.

Today, the number of Crimean MPs not interested in radical and complex changes is much less than the one of those devising certain political schemes. It is likely that disintegration of the United Ukraine bloc in Kyiv, enabling some parties and politicians to act independently, was a major factor of changes in the Crimean parliament.

Since recently, compromising information on politicians has been widely used in the Crimea. In summer 2002, head of the local department of the State Stock Market and Securities Commission Volodymyr Tykhonchuk accused the Crimean leadership of actions that had cost Ukraine and the Crimea hundred million hryvnias. On September 8, 2002, he repeated his accusations and pointed out that some high Crimean officials actually had not complied with valid legislation thereby undermining the national economy and welfare of the Ukrainian population (UNIAN, October 8, 2002). Most likely, intensity of Crimean economic scandals will be proportionate to that of political tension.

Meanwhile, of special note is a conflict generated by Lev Myrmysky's efforts to enter the Crimean political scene. By the way, Crimean observers believed that there was a strong possibility that Kunitsyn's opponents would attempt to remove him from power and replace him with either Lev Myrmysky or Vasyl Khmelnytsky, a politician capable of ensuring positive attitude to Myrmysky's program on the part of higher echelons of power (the Zerkalo Nedeli weekly, No. 31, 2002). Volodymyr Kozhura, deputy head of the Crimean regional department of the SDPU, believes that «Those two politicians strive for power in order to change the Crimean government and leadership» (<http://part.org.ua>, September 23, 2002). According to Crimean communist L. Bezaziev, «At present, it is difficult to predict who will take Kunitsyn's office. Deputies who won the Crimean by-elections will either take his seat or nominate their candidate. Otherwise they would have never left Kyiv.»

Crimean Prime Minister Serhiy Kunitsyn noted, «I am completely satisfied that today, Crimean representative and executive power work together and that Crimean politicians act as a team.» He also mentioned that President of Ukraine Leonid Kuchma gave a wholehearted support to Crimean speaker Borys Deich and Prime Minister Serhiy Kunitsyn, since their actions were geared toward stabilization of the situation in the Crimea. Hence, the role of Serhiy Kunitsyn should not be underestimated in the above context, for he has managed to retain his office longer than anyone else – for over three years.

Although, winners of the 2002 by-elections were rather laconic. Having announced his intention to run for the mandate of deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, Vasyl Khmelnitsky emphasized that he was not going to influence the Crimean politics. He stated that he had no desire to work for the Crimean government but was willing to be elected as deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine once again. However, Vasyl Khmelnitsky did not rule out a possibility of making some impact on the economic sphere. «I have a wide experience as an economist and I am interested to bring about positive changes in the Crimea», he said (UNIAN, September 23, 2002). So, he mentioned that he would probably make some economic proposals to the Crimean government.

On the contrary, Lev Myrmysky announced his intentions «to instill political culture in the Crimean political life so that to enable people to normally communicate, make them not afraid of criticizing each other and perceive critics not as a threat.» According to Lev Myrmysky, he was going to form a faction oriented towards sustainable economic development of the Crimea. Though, he also stressed that speculations relating to his desire to take the seat of the speaker or Premier were nothing but provocations. «I do not uphold revolution or coup. I stand for a stable situation in the Crimea», he pointed out. Nevertheless, his interpretation of the notion «stability» in that context remained unclear.

But this way or another, in the viewpoint of deputy head of the Crimean Mejlis Refat Chubarov MP, election of Lev Myrmysky and Vasyl Khmelnitsky as deputies of the Crimean parliament can actually entail changes in correlation of forces in Crimean politics. «Such changes are quite possible, as Lev Myrmysky intends to enhance his rather strong influence on the economic life of the Crimea», he noted. According to Refat Chubarov, implementation of the above goal could be made on a step-by-step basis. The first stage will include «formation of a controlled coalition» that can consist of communists, members of the Russian bloc and the Union Party. However, the coalition would not be powerful enough to make a strong impact, so other factors could matter as well. «Perhaps, that is why there are a lot of lobby interviews discussing prices for MPs and the recent by-elections proved that a price factor played a major role», he said. Hence, formation of a powerful faction, a kind of the so-called new majority, is the shortest way to change the Crimean government. And should present speaker Borys Deich interfere with those processes, he will be removed as well. Although, Refat Chubarov also mentioned some specific risks and problems that might arise in the above context. One of them is the ability of Lev Myrmysky to receive mandate of the Crimean MP simultaneously retaining his mandate of deputy of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, which is prohibited by Ukraine's legislation. According to forecasts, should Lev Myrmysky fail to realize his Crimean plans, he will return to Kyiv.

It remains unclear whether parties concerned will receive permission of the President of Ukraine to change the Crimean leadership.

Hence, Crimean political stability is in for new trials and further developments are likely to bring many surprises.